

**James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, December 20, 1787. Partly in Cipher. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.**

**TO THOMAS JEFFERSON. CHIC. HIST. SOC. MSS.**

New York, December 20, 1787.

Dear Sir: —

The packet has been detained here since the date of the letter which you will receive along with this, by some preparations suggested by an apprehension of war. The delay is very unfavorable to the trees on board for you.

Mr. De la Forest,<sup>1</sup> the consul here, called on me a few days ago and told me he had information that the farmers general and Mr. Morris having found their contract mutually advantageous, are evading the resolution of the committee by tacit arrangements for its continuance. He observed that the object of the farmers was singly profit, that of the Government twofold, revenue and commerce. It was consequently the wish of the latter to render the monopoly as little hurtful to the trade with America as possible. He suggested as an expedient that farmers should be required to divide the contracts among six or seven houses, French and American,

1 Then Vice-Consul-General of France "with Congress." He was Consul-General for New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware from October 17, 1792.

who should be required to ship annually to America a reasonable proportion of goods. This he supposed would produce competition in the purchases here and would introduce

## Library of Congress

a competition also with British goods here. The latter condition he said could not be well required of, or executed by a single contractor, and the Government could not abolish the farm. These ideas were meant for you.

Since the date of my other letter, the Convention of Delaware have unanimously adopted the new Constitution.<sup>1</sup> That of Pennsylvania has adopted it by a majority of 46 against 23. That of New Jersey is sitting and will adopt pretty unanimously. These are all the Conventions that have met. I hear from North Carolina that the Assembly is well disposed. Mr. Henry, Mr. Mason, R. H. Lee, and the Governor continue by their influence to strengthen the opposition in Virginia. The Assembly there is engaged in several mad freaks. Among others a bill has been agreed to in the House of Delegates *prohibiting* the importation of rum, *brandy*, and all other spirits not distilled from some Ameri

can production. All brewed liquors under the same description, with beef, tallow-candles, cheese, &c. are included in the prohibition. In order to enforce this despotic measure the most despotic means are resorted to. If any person be found after the commencement of the act, in the use or *possession* of any of the prohibited

<sup>1</sup> Delaware was the first State to ratify the Constitution—December 7, 1787. Pennsylvania, the second State, ratified December 12th; New Jersey, the third State, December 18th.

articles, tho' acquired previous to the law, he is to lose them, and pay a heavy fine. This is the form in which the bill was agreed to by a large majority in the House of Delegates. It is a child of Mr. Henry and said to be his favorite one. They first voted by a *majority of 30* that all legal obstruction to the Treaty of Peace should cease in Virginia as soon as laws complying with it should have passed in all the other states. This was the result of four days debate with the most violent opposition from Mr. Henry. A few days afterward he renewed his efforts, and got a vote, *by a majority of 50*, that Virginia would not comply until G. B. shall have complied.

## Library of Congress

The States seem to be either wholly omitting to provide for the federal Treasury, or to be withdrawing the scanty appropriations made to it. The latter course has been taken up by Massachusetts, Virginia and Delaware. The Treasury Board seems to be in despair of maintaining the shadow of Government much longer. Without money, the offices must be shut up, and the handful of troops on the frontier disbanded, which will probably bring on an Indian War, and make an impression to our disadvantage on the British Garrisons within our limits.

A letter from Mr. Archd. Stuart dated Richd. Dec. 2, has the following paragraph  
“Yesterday a Boat with sixteen men was brought down the canal from Westham to its termination which is within one mile and a half of Richmond.”

I subjoin an extract from a letter from Genl. Washington dated Dec. 7th which contains the best information I can give as to the progress of

the works on the Potomac.

“The survey of the Country between the Eastern & Western waters is not yet reported by the Commissioners, though promised to be made very shortly, the survey being completed—no draught that can convey the adequate idea of the work on this river has been yet taken—much of the labor, except at the great falls, has been bestowed in the bed of the river, in a removal of rocks, and deepening the water. At the great falls the labour has indeed been great. The water there (a sufficiency I mean) is taken into a Canal about two hundred yards above the cateract, & conveyed by a level cut (through a solid rock in some places, and much stone every where) more than a mile to the lock seats,—five in number by means of which when completed, the craft will be let into the River below the falls (wch. together amount to seventy six feet.)—At the Seneca Falls, six miles above the great falls, a channel which has been formed by the river when inundated is under improvement for navigation—The same, in part, at Shanandoah.—At the lower falls, where nothing has yet been done, a level cut and locks are proposed. These constitute the principal difficulties

## Library of Congress

and will be the great expense of this undertaking—The parts of the river between requiring loose stones only to be removed in order to deepen the water where it is too shallow in dry seasons.”

The triennial purge administered to the Council in Virga.<sup>1</sup> has removed from their seats Samson Matthews—and Mr. Selden. Col. Wm. Heth and Major Jos. Egglestone Supply their places.—I remain Dr. Sir Yrs. affect.

<sup>1</sup> The Privy Council or Council of State of Virginia consisted of eight members. Every two years two members were removed by joint ballot of the Assembly and were ineligible for re-election for the next three years, their places being filled by election by the Assembly. See *ante*, Vol. II., p. 40, for Madison's opinion of the Council.